Autism Spectrum Disorders Fact Sheet for Faculty and Staff

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by social, communication and behavioral challenges. Autism is known as a “spectrum” disorder because there is a wide variety symptoms and behaviors. Asperger’s Syndrome falls within the spectrum and is sometimes referred to as “High Functioning Autism”. Autism is one form of neurological differences that we see on campus.

The following list is a general overview of Autism Spectrum Disorder. An individual on the Autism Spectrum may exhibit some of the following characteristics

- May exhibit awkward eye contact and gestures
- Difficulty with changes in classroom, seating and syllabi
- Sensory sensitivity (lights, sounds, touch, smells)
- May have delayed responses
- May misunderstand tone of voice, jokes, facial expression and sarcasm
- Oddities in vocal pitch, volume, intonation
- Strong, narrow interest
- Displays literal and concrete thinking pattern
- May have difficulty understanding social rules such as personal space
- May use calming or focusing strategies such as rocking, taping or pacing
- May become easily overwhelmed

Strengths
- Above average or superior intellect
- Ability to follow instructions and rules very accurately when taught in the correct way
- Ability to carry out tasks with a high degree of accuracy
- Diligent with routine work and excellent memory
- Strong pursuit of knowledge within areas of interest
- Tendency to have a strong sense of loyalty in all social relationships
- Good visual and spatial learners
- Ability to bring an innovative approach to problem solving
- Unique ability to perceive things in new ways, out of the box thinking

Struggles
- May misread social cues or facial expressions
- Initiating, planning and organizing and carrying out tasks
- Understanding social rules
- Assessing priorities and performance
- Working in groups
- Interpreting vague instructions
- Sensory sensitivity may affect classroom success
- Abstract concepts and seeing the “big picture”
• Asking for clarification or for assistance

Ways to Support Students
• Be concise and specific with instructions
• Provide direct feedback and set clear boundaries
• Provide explicit instructions on how to work in groups including how to divide up work
• Consider allowing use of laptop or other voice-activated technology to take notes
• Provide visual learning tools when possible (pictures, charts)
• Avoid idioms, metaphors and sarcasm
• Provide additional options for class participation such as electronic comments, coming to office hours
• Avoid cold-calling in class
• Supplement oral instructions with written instructions